

**[Begin Harold Kobata - CD 1]**

**Interviewer:**

It is 3:10 on March 22, 2004. My name is Lily Nakatani and I will be interviewing Harold Takashi Kobata today as part of the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio equipment recording this interview is being monitored by Ernie Tsujimoto, and the interview is being cataloged by Jeannie Tsujimoto. All copyrights, title, and any other rights arising out of this interview, whether in its entirety, part, or derivative form and whether in audio, written, or any other format, shall belong to the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. Copying of this interview recording, whether in its entirety or part is strictly prohibited without a written authorization from the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. This is the first CD of the interview of Harold Takashi Kobata being recorded on this date. Let's begin the interview.

**Kobata:**

Okay.

**Interviewer:**

So first . . . well Harold, let's just start at the very beginning. When were you born?

**Kobata:**

I was born on April 5th of 1926.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and where were you born?

**Kobata:**

In Gardena, according to my birth certificate.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so when your . . . let's see, if you were born in Gardena, did you---were you . . . what were they called then? Were you born in a hospital or do you know?

**Kobata:**

I really don't know, but I think a doctor did sign off on the birth certificate.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and what were your parents' names?

**Kobata:**

My father's name was Harry Giichiro and my mother's name was Umeno and her maiden name was Kamada and her last name was Kobata.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and where did they come from?

**Kobata:**

Wakayama, Japan.

**Interviewer:**

They both came from Wakayama?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

So they were married in Wakayama before they came here or do you know?

**Kobata:**

From what I understand that they were married in Tacoma, Washington at the port of entry. That's the story I heard.

**Interviewer:**

Was he here first? Your father was here first?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-hm, yes.

**Interviewer:**

And did he call your mother over was she a picture bride? Do you know?

**Kobata:**

I really don't know---maybe; you know I really don't know the details, but probably some sort of arrangement was made.

**Interviewer:**

I see. And, how did they get from Tacoma to . . . ?

**Kobata:**

In those days?

**Interviewer:**

Were . . . so did they live in---where did they live when they came to . . . ?

**Kobata:**

They lived in Los Angeles where my grandfather already had a home---in Los Angeles.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so your grandfather was already here?

**Kobata:**

Yes; he came over I think in 1892 or something like that.

**Interviewer:**

And, so was the rest of your family---was the rest of his family in Japan still then---his sons and his wife and everything?

**Kobata:**

Well, my grandfather you're talking about?

**Interviewer:**

Yes.

**Kobata:**

Yes; you know I don't know of any other sons or siblings or anything of that sort. I only know when my Uncle Jimmy Kobata or James Kobata that was born here in 1902.

**Interviewer:**

My gosh, and they have English names?

**Kobata:**

Yes; and some of them are so-called given names.

**Interviewer:**

Okay.

**Kobata:**

Like Harry . . . you know nobody could pronounce Giichiro; so he went by Harry.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so he chose that name sort of like maybe?

**Kobata:**

Apparently or the school kids picked it for him.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, okay. So were you---so your father was educated in Japan then?

0:04:04.3

**Kobata:**

Primarily yeah; and then we have a photo of him that looked like he was---graduated junior high school here.

**Interviewer:**

Here?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm; that is there's a picture of a lot of boys and girls with him in the picture.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm; that's interesting. So he had an education here in the United States, but went back to Japan?

**Kobata:**

No, I don't think he went back to Japan. No, he came over, and then I think he must have been only about 10 or 12 or something like that; then went to junior high school. And then my mother came later in 19---1920 or something like that . . . not 1920--1910. That's when they were married, 1910. They were both 20 years old.

**Interviewer:**

I see; so when you say they got married in Tacoma, Washington when they both came here . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, they didn't both come here. I guess, apparently he went to meet her at Tacoma.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; all right well let's go on. Let's see; so how did they settle here---they settled here in Gardena because your father was already---your grandfather was already here?

**Kobata:**

No, they initially settled in Los Angeles because the grandfather was there. And then the grandfather later moved to Gardena in 1905. And . . .

**Interviewer:**

Oh, that's really early.

**Kobata:**

. . . then my father and mother moved here, I think in the '20s or something like that. I don't . . .

**Interviewer:**

Oh; and what did your grandfather do in 1905 here?

**Kobata:**

He was a flower grower. He grew flowers; you know there was a lot of---a lot of people, I guess, in the farm or flower growing business. And, he grew the flowers here and had to take the market in the---downtown Los Angeles, 7th and Wall Street. I guess he took a railroad car, and then I think later or horse and carriage and **[Laughs]** and probably old car---Model T or something like that.

0:06:25.3

**Interviewer:**

Wow, so then what did your father do then as an occupation?

**Kobata:**

He was in the same business; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So he worked with your father?

**Kobata:**

Yes; no---yeah; my father and grandfather worked together; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

And did your grandfather stay in the United States for the rest of his life?

**Kobata:**

Yes, yes; in fact, he's buried at Pacific Crest Cemetery.

**Interviewer:**

He is?

**Kobata:**

Yeah, uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, when did he pass away---grandfather?

**Kobata:**

I don't recall; I imagine it was in 1920s I guess.

**Interviewer:**

Did you ever know him?

**Kobata:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

You never knew him?

**Kobata:**

Never knew him.

**Interviewer:**

How about your grandmother?

**Kobata:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

You never knew her either?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; and I don't recall anything about her too much.

**Interviewer:**

Is that right? So did she pass away around the same time then?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; uh-hm.

0:07:19.4

**Interviewer:**

So then, did your father lease the land here in Gardena?

**Kobata:**

No, they bought the land.

**Interviewer:**

How did they buy the land?

**Kobata:**

Because my uncle was born here. Remember, James Kobata---Jimmy Kobata; he was born here and by, you know by the time he was of legal age, he was able to buy land.

**Interviewer:**

So your father was born in Japan?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

But another son was born here in America then?

**Kobata:**

That's right.

**Interviewer:**

And so there's---is there a big gap in age then?

**Kobata:**

Let's see---12 years, I think it was.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; so your uncle bought the land in Gardena?

**Kobata:**

Yes; in fact, he bought a lot of land all over the Southern California for other people.

**Interviewer:**

Is that right?

**Kobata:**

You know because he was the only Nisei around, and the other people couldn't own land. So, they had to buy land for other people.

**Interviewer:**

So, do you know when they bought the land then---around?

**Kobata:**

No, I really don't know.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I wonder how much it was bought for.

**Kobata:**

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

That would be kind of interesting to find that out. So, do you--  
--did your father ever tell you anything about, you know business  
or how it was, you know back then when . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, I never knew my father that much because he died when I was  
seven years old.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, what---how did he pass away?

0:08:45.8

**Kobata:**

Kidney disease and probably high blood pressure---kidney  
disease; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

I see; so then who ran the nursery?

**Kobata:**

Uncle Jimmy and my two older brothers.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; so tell me about your brothers and sisters then. Maybe  
you could name them and tell us when they were born.

**Kobata:**

Mabel Chieko Kobata . . . well not Kobata; it's Takata is my  
oldest sister and she's the oldest one of the family. You know I  
can't remember when she was born. I think she was born in 1911.  
And then the next one was Yoshio Kobata, and I think he was born  
about 1915. And the next one was George Kobata and I guess he  
was born, you know probably 1918 or something like that. I have  
it in the book, but I you know I don't---I can't remember just  
off hand.



**Interviewer:**

Yeah; that's okay. And then you have one more.

**Kobata:**

Oh, my brother, Ed [**Laughs**]; he was born in 1928.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so you're in between George and Edward then?

**Kobata:**

That's right.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; and were you given the---like Mabel and Yoshio---Mabel and George, how did they get their names?

**Kobata:**

Well, Mabel apparently picked it up. Her Japanese name was Chieko or Chieko---something like that. And apparently, she picked it up somewhere along the lines.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so that wasn't her given name then?

**Kobata:**

I don't believe so.

**Interviewer:**

How about George?

0:10:30.8

**Kobata:**

No, that was a given name, but it's also---in Japanese it's the same thing as Georgie or something like that. [**Laughs**]

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay.

**Kobata:**

Yeah, so . . . .

**Interviewer:**

And then you were given the name, Harold?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And your brother was given the name, Edward?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Was there---did anybody choose your name for you or your mother?

**Kobata:**

No, I suspect that it was my uncle. And I think he named me after Harold Teen, one of the comics during the '20s or '30s.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, okay. [Laughs] All right; so if your father passed away early then your mother . . .

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

. . . she ran the flower business?

**Kobata:**

Pretty much; I mean it's---Uncle Jimmy really ran the business, but she was one of the so-called matriarch, I guess, of the family. She took charge of a lot of things; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so she was a businesswoman pretty much?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-hm; yes.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; that's kind of unusual back then, you know. But maybe . . .

.

**Kobata:**

Well, she was, you know at home businesswoman because my uncle was the real one that had the business brains because he had a business degree from UCLA.

**Interviewer:**

Really?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

So when did he graduate UCLA?

**Kobata:**

I think it was in the mid-'20s---1920s or somewhere in there.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so he used his . . . wow.

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So he would be a Nisei---your uncle?

**Kobata:**

Well; yes that's right.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; and your mother was an Issei though?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And your father was an Issei, too?

**Kobata:**

Father was an Issei; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So you would be a Nisei then?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

0:12:18.5

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; all right okay. Let's see, what elementary school did you go to?

**Kobata:**  
Amestoy Elementary School.

**Interviewer:**  
What was it like back then going to school?

**Kobata:**  
Well, I would say it was a lot of fun. We had to walk to school, of course. You know it's about what, two miles from here.

**Interviewer:**  
Uh-huh.

**Kobata:**  
Do you know where it is?

**Interviewer:**  
Yeah.

**Kobata:**  
Yeah.

**Interviewer:**  
Wow; and were there many Japanese kids there?

**Kobata:**  
Oh, quite a few---a lot of the farmer kids and other people, you know.

**Interviewer:**  
And how did people---most of the kids go to school? How did they get to school?

**Kobata:**  
Walk---they were within walking distance.

**Interviewer:**  
So what was the---do you remember the makeup of the class? Was it mostly Caucasians?

**Kobata:**  
I . . . it was mostly Caucasian and, you know I guess there was a fair percentage of Japanese there.

**Interviewer:**

And what did . . . do you know what the other kids' parents did as an occupation, I wonder.

**Kobata:**

You know I have . . . oh, you mean the Japanese kids?

**Interviewer:**

No, the Caucasian kids.

**Kobata:**

I really don't know. I imagine there were---a lot of them were probably blue collar.

**Interviewer:**

So I wonder how far, you know from what the border for Amestoy Elementary School was as far as school border?

**Kobata:**

[Laughs] I really don't know.

**Interviewer:**

Was there---that was the only elementary school?

**Kobata:**

There were three elementary schools in Gardena---Amestoy, Gardena Elementary, which was the first one here, and Chapman, that was the last one at that time.

**Interviewer:**

I see; and so when you---like after school, you played---did you play or did you help in the farm?

**Kobata:**

No, I was too young to help in the farm so I---we did play quite a bit.

**Interviewer:**

Who'd you play with?

**Kobata:**

You know I---with my brother and then . . . this was . . . we're talking about elementary school level?

**Interviewer:**

Yeah.

**Kobata:**

Yeah; you know I really don't remember that much. But, it mostly was my brother because I was fairly country-fied so you couldn't---didn't have very many friends close by.

0:14:34.6

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; what'd you guys play?

**Kobata:**

What?

**Interviewer:**

What did you guys play? [Laughs]

**Kobata:**

[Laughs] I really don't know. I think we didn't play as much as, you know followed my mother around and watched the other Mexican laborers do their work and . . . .

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh; is there any time you started working in the nursery--- in the business?

**Kobata:**

No, it wasn't until after the war that we did---we started working. We were fairly young yet, and we're sort of on the spoiled side, I guess.

**Interviewer:**

[Laughs] And did you go to Japanese school?

**Kobata:**

Yes, I went to Moneta Gakkuen for about you know maybe seven--- six or seven years.

**Interviewer:**

Okay.

**Kobata:**

Then went to Compton Gakkuen for two years, and that was the extent of my Japanese education. And I never learned anything.

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

So when did you go? Was it every day or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Well, I think we---at Moneta I think we started with Saturdays. And then when we got to junior high school then we went every day because from Gardena High School, you just walk over to Moneta Gakeun, which is the JCI now.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I didn't know that.

**Kobata:**

So we used to go every day. And then Saturdays was reserved for a-play---it was really a YMCA---we were in the YMCA club, so that was the day we played baseball and, I guess, touch football and everything like that.

**Interviewer:**

Oh so you had a lot of fun then?

**Kobata:**

Yes, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Oh yeah; so where did you go to junior high school and high school?

**Kobata:**

Gardena High School was the junior high school. It was a combination high school-junior high school. And I went to the junior high part because I think I was in---they started with the 7th and I think I ended up about the 8th grade before we left.

**Interviewer:**

What do you mean you left?

**Kobata:**

Well, when we evacuated.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see. Okay; so how old were you when the war broke out?

0:16:49.5

**Kobata:**

Let's see; I'm trying to figure it out. I think I was about 15 to 16.

**Interviewer:**

Oh yeah; what was it like then when---so were you at school when the news of Pearl Harbor broke or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, that was on a---I think it was on a Sunday, so we would be at home, you know.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh; and . . . ?

**Kobata:**

And then the next day we went to school as usual, and you know there was some commotion, but there wasn't that much. I mean, people in Gardena, they knew the Japanese quite well; so.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh; how did your parents react to Pearl Harbor?

**Kobata:**

You know I don't recall. I mean, just a matter of fact I guess.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; so how long was it before things got kind of you know uncomfortable? Was there any time when things got uncomfortable after Pearl Harbor?

**Kobata:**

Well, you know not that I recall. It's the fact that we knew the evacuation was coming, and then when it got a little uncomfortable, I would say. And probably that would be in January of 1942 or somewhere.

0:18:07.2

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; what do you mean by uncomfortable?

**Kobata:**



Anxious that we didn't know what was going to happen and just anticipation of what's going to---what's ahead for us; that's all.

**Interviewer:**

So when did you find out, you know were you kind of involved? I guess as a middle---not the oldest in the family, you were kind of like tagged along with everybody else?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; in many cases yeah that was the case. And you know I didn't have any responsibilities or anything. And you know we were like---when we evacuated to Salt Lake City and we traveled by car, and we just thought it was kind of lark---it's a challenge, you know. We didn't think too much about it.

**Interviewer:**

Now when war broke out, Mabel---was she married?

**Kobata:**

Yes, she was.

**Interviewer:**

She was married; did she have children?

**Kobata:**

No, not at that time.

**Interviewer:**

And how about **Yoshio**? What was his status when war broke out?

**Kobata:**

Let's see; he was married and I think he had one child.

**Interviewer:**

And George?

**Kobata:**

He wasn't married.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and how about Edward?

**Kobata:**

No, he wasn't.

**Interviewer:**

He was too . . .

**Kobata:**

Too young; he was younger than I was.

**Interviewer:**

. . . young yeah; right younger than you. Oh okay; so what was it like then when you knew you had to evacuate? How'd you . . . now, I read your little description here that everybody kind of like went different places at evacuation time.

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah; that's because my father---I mean, my older brothers and Uncle Jimmy had to stay behind to sell off the Easter lily crop because that was one of the main money crops. So they stayed behind. So they were---went to Santa Anita and then to Rohwer, Arkansas.

**Interviewer:**

So they allowed them to stay and finish their business?

**Kobata:**

Yeah, uh-hm; well they were there till the last day you know.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; and how about Mabel? She was already married, so?

**Kobata:**

No; let's see. Mabel, her husband, my mother, myself, and my younger brother, we went to Salt Lake City by car.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; what kind of car did you guys have then?

0:20:30.7

**Kobata:**

1939 Mercury.

**Interviewer:**

Oh wow. [Laughs]

**Kobata:**

Well it had no heater and no radio, no air conditioning.  
[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

[Laughs] Not too many did back then. And then Yoshio, he was older; and what did he do when war---when the evacuation time came?

**Kobata:**

Well, he stayed behind and then he was, you know sent to Santa Anita with the rest of the people that were left behind and George.

**Interviewer:**

And he was married then; right?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

And George stayed behind to finish?

**Kobata:**

Also, yeah.

**Interviewer:**

And then what did he---where did he go?

**Kobata:**

Same place---Santa Anita and Rohwer. They all ended up in Rohwer.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so who made the decision for you to go to Utah?

**Kobata:**

I think it was my older brother, and he knew a fellow named, Tom Kuramada who lived here, but he grew up in Salt Lake City. And through Tom Kuramada and Yo's best friend, that was Sam Ishihara that had a business in Gardena---Sam I think bought a---was able to financially buy a duplex in Salt Lake City. And we were allowed to live in one for a while until . . . let's see; my uncle bought another place and then we moved away from the duplex.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; so he was able to buy something in Salt Lake City?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

That's pretty good. So what did you do with the farm after you left?

**Kobata:**

That was being taken care of by a retired missionary minister and one of our Mexican foreman. They ran the nursery while we were gone.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; and what about your house?

0:22:19.8

**Kobata:**

I think the Reverend Ross, I think he lived there. I don't exactly remember, but I think he must have lived there; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

And did he---this reverend have a family as well?

**Kobata:**

No, he didn't have a family.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay.

**Kobata:**

He was a missionary to Japan; so he knew---you know we knew him quite well.

**Interviewer:**

And how big was your farm?

**Kobata:**

It wasn't a farm; it was really a nursery.

**Interviewer:**

Nursery---how big was your . . .

**Kobata:**

Huh?

**Interviewer:**

. . . nursery?

**Kobata:**

How big was it?

**Interviewer:**

Uh-hm; do you remember?

**Kobata:**

Let's see; probably about 10 acres total.

**Interviewer:**

That's quite an . . . .

**Kobata:**

And there's a . . . I think half of it was under glass.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; a greenhouse?

**Kobata:**

Yes, in fact all the Kobata's were in the greenhouse business.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see. Okay; well let's see now; let's talk about some of your experiences in . . . okay before we do that, do you want to take a little break and maybe we'll stop right now.

**Kobata:**

Oh okay; fine.

0:23:32.6

[Break]

**Interviewer:**

Okay; let's talk a little bit about your experiences in Utah. So how old were you when you went to Utah?

**Kobata:**

How old was I?

**Interviewer:**

Uh-hm.

**Kobata:**

Probably about 15 and a half or 16---somewhere in that area.

**Interviewer:**

So you were in high school then in Utah?

**Kobata:**

No, I was still in junior high school.

**Interviewer:**

Okay.

**Kobata:**

And I think I went to Bryant Junior High School in Salt Lake City for, I think, a year---year and a half. And then later on I went to East High School in Salt Lake City.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm; so what was it like you know during the war and were there any Japanese kids in your high school?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah, yeah; there was quite a few Japanese in Salt Lake City at that time because a lot of them evacuated to Salt Lake City like we did.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, uh-huh; so were there . . . how was it then? Did you face any discrimination in high school?

**Kobata:**

No, not very much. You know the usual Hakujuin versus Japanese or, you know there's a little bit of a distance, but there's no outward discrimination; no.

**Interviewer:**

Were they mostly Mormons, too?

**Kobata:**

Yes, they were Mormons.

**Interviewer:**

Did that---I wonder if that had any bearing on how they treated . . . ?

**Kobata:**

I think it did; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

So when you were going from Gardena to Salt Lake City, what was that like? Do you remember that part?

**Kobata:**

No, I just know that we drove there and I don't recall a detail whether it was hot and miserable or not; I don't remember.

**Interviewer:**

Did you do any of the driving?

**Kobata:**

No, not then.

0:25:16.3

**Interviewer:**

Who did all the driving?

**Kobata:**

I think my brother-in-law, Eddie Takata did the driving.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, this is Mabel's husband?

**Kobata:**

Husband, yes.

**Interviewer:**

What was your . . . I'm just curious; was your mother able to drive? Did she drive?

**Kobata:**

No, she didn't.

**Interviewer:**

She never learned how to drive?

**Kobata:**

Well, she might have---she probably could have driven around the nursery, but not on the streets.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; **[Laughs]** a lot of Issei women usually didn't drive back then. Actually, your mom yeah was Issei; yeah.

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so were you involved in anything in the high school? Or, did you play sports or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, I was too busy trying to earn enough money to, you know buy stuff for my school, you know like clothing. Not---you didn't have to buy books, but mostly clothing, because you had to have winter wear and summer wear there, so it was a little bit more expensive to buy clothing.

**Interviewer:**

So what did---how did you buy---how did you earn the money?

**Kobata:**

Well, I was---I worked as a gardener after school and Saturdays. So, you know my days were pretty well filled.

**Interviewer:**

Did you do that by yourself, or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

At---the first year, my brother-in-law, Eddie Takata and his cousin, Harry Murakami, they took me along and taught me, you know all the tricks of the trade. So then after that, I got a job with a lawyer for I think it was Kennecott Copper or Utah Copper Company. He had a big, you know house and I was the gardener there. **[Laughs]** I just mostly cut the lawn and you know did the weeding. Somebody else did the tending to the roses and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so they had all the equipment. Did you have to buy any equipment of your own?

**Kobata:**

No, no; there was no equipment to buy because there's nothing available because of the war. So things were hard to get. So they had mainly just a lawn mower---a push lawn mower, which was really hard because I had to take that thing down a canyon and



then cut the lawn down at the bottom, which they had a little lake there---a pond, and then take it up, further up, and there's a big piece of lawn there that I had to cut.

**Interviewer:**

So they had like a big estate like?

0:27:52.7

**Kobata:**

Yeah; and then I had---then after that, I had to bring it back up and go by the---cut the lawn by the rose garden. And you know they didn't have any edgers or anything like that. So I had to hand-clip everything around the edge of the lawn.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; so that was . . . did you go to other places to do the gardening or that was your main . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, that was the one and only; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

That took all your time?

**Kobata:**

Yeah, uh-hm; that was during high school.

**Interviewer:**

Were they nice people to work for?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah, very nice; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; so after high school, did you graduate high school in Utah?

**Kobata:**

Yes, I did---1945.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; so did your family, did they come---when did they come back then?

**Kobata:**

We came back as soon as I graduated---maybe a week after I graduated. It was in July that we came back. It wasn't the entire family. My---it was my sister-in-law, Sumi Kobata, that is George's wife, and my younger brother and myself. And I think there was someone else, but I don't recall who. There was five--  
-I think four in the car when we drove back from Utah.

**Interviewer:**

Now how did George's wife . . . why was she with you in Utah?

**Kobata:**

Because she and George were married in Rohwer Arkansas, and then George came back to live with the family. And you know they had to have a place to go to, you know a home or someplace.

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Kobata:**

And so, they were---we were living in the same house.

**Interviewer:**

So they left camp then essentially?

0:29:32.9

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Now, I understand did you have---your brothers were involved in the military in some way.

**Kobata:**

During World War II; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah, during World War II; yeah.

**Kobata:**

Yeah; yes, my oldest brother, Yo, was drafted and he was you know went through the basic training. And then he went to MIS School and I think it was in Minnesota---Camp Savage or something like that. And by the time he graduated, the war was over. And then my brother, George, was also drafted and he ended up in Korea after the war. He was never in actual combat duty,

but you know the---after the war, the---there was a Korean so-called military zone or something like that. There was a 30--- it's called a 38th Parallel. He was on the 38th Parallel protecting the border.

**Interviewer:**

Oh wow; so now did . . . I forgot to ask, but in your family home, I mean did everybody speak Japanese only?

**Kobata:**

At home?

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh; when you were growing up?

**Kobata:**

Well, it was mostly half and half. You know the conversation at the dinner table was mostly in Japanese. But the conversations with my brothers and sisters were all in English.

**Interviewer:**

So when you spoke to your parents though, it was always Japanese?

**Kobata:**

Well, let's say sort of a broken Japanese---very, very broken Japanese. I could barely speak it.

0:31:19.0

**Interviewer:**

So do you speak Japanese now?

**Kobata:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Very rarely?

**Kobata:**

Just know a few words.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; [Laughs] so when Yoshio went to the MIS . . .

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

. . . did he go to be like a translator or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; that's essentially . . . .

**Interviewer:**

But he never had an opportunity to do anything . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, no; yeah he was already married---had two kids at that time.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; so what happened when the war ended? What happened to  
**Yoshio?**

**Kobata:**

He had moved from Rohwer to Michigan and he had worked at a rose garden there. And then . . . did he go back? You know I don't recall; I think he went back to Michigan to be with his family. And then finally he came back to the nursery I think a couple years after 1945.

**Interviewer:**

Oh so during the war---when did he go to Minneapolis to MIS School? This is during the war?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And so after the war was over then, he just---he was released from duty?

**Kobata:**

Apparently, because you know he was actually over-age and had dependents.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see. And then George was at an age---he didn't have any children yet?

**Kobata:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; so that's why he went to Korea?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Did he---when did he come back? Do you remember?

**Kobata:**

No, I don't recall.

**Interviewer:**

And then so did everybody relocate back to Gardena when the war--  
--eventually, after everything settled down?

**Kobata:**

That's correct.

**Interviewer:**

What about Edward, your brother---youngest brother? What did he do?

**Kobata:**

During the war?

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; he went to high school with you?

**Kobata:**

He went to high school, but he went to a different high school.  
He went to South High School.

**Interviewer:**

And why was that?

**Kobata:**

The reason is that I---I had a job in the so-called richer part  
of town, so I went to East High School so I could go directly  
from high school and walk over to the house that I was  
gardening. But, he didn't have---he didn't have to work; so he  
went to a brand new high school called, South High School.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; and so did he come back and finish high school here in Gardena?

0:33:52.6

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

So he finished Gardena High School?

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; so when you came back to Gardena what was it---do you remember what it was like when you came back? And how did you come back?

**Kobata:**

Well, we came back by using the same car---the 1939 Mercury. You know I think I told you with my sister-in-law, Sumi, my younger brother, myself, and there was a fourth person; I don't remember who that was.

**Interviewer:**

And your mother was in the car?

**Kobata:**

No, my mother stayed back.

**Interviewer:**

In Utah?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Why?

**Kobata:**

She didn't come back. I don't know; I guess it was---she came back on a second trip or something. I guess it was only so many could fit in the car.

**Interviewer:**

What about all your belongings in Utah; what happened to that?

**Kobata:**

You know I really don't know. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

[Laughs] So now when you came back to Gardena, did you immediately come back to your home or what happened?

**Kobata:**

Yes, we came back to our home.

**Interviewer:**

So you notified the reverend that you were coming back?

**Kobata:**

No, no; my---what happened was my uncle had already come back probably in May or June, and he had, you know he had all the house ready for us to move into and everything arranged.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

So when we came back, you know there wasn't that much of a problem.

**Interviewer:**

How nice, and so now did your Uncle Jimmy, did he have a family and a wife and family?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; he had a wife and family. Let's see; he had a wife, but I don't know about the family. I don't recall whether Betty was born after the war or before the war.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, this is a different . . . Betty?

**Kobata:**

Betty Iwamasa---Betty Iwamasa.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, okay. She was born before the war.

**Kobata:**

Huh?

**Interviewer:**

She was---her father is your Uncle Jimmy?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, I see, oh---hmm. So---now where did Uncle Jimmy go during the war?

**Kobata:**

He went to Rohwer, and then he came back to Salt Lake City.

**Interviewer:**

That's interesting how everybody went to different places.

**Kobata:**

Well, that's because part of---part of the family stayed back until they were, you know forcibly evacuated while some of us were volunteer evacuees.

**Interviewer:**

Oh that's right; you got a 72-hour window to get out of the state, and then the rest---then you know until you were forced evacuation.

**0:36:40.8**

**Kobata:**

I think the window was a little larger than 72-hours.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, okay. All right; let's see now, when you finished high school then what did you do?

**Kobata:**

I went to . . . well I worked at the nursery during the summer. And after work, I mean after school, and I went to Compton Junior College for two years. And I went with a lot of friends [Laughs]. A lot of the Japanese had already come back. So I know I---we took Jimmy Kamada to school because he didn't have transportation. So we provided transportation.

**Interviewer:**



Okay; and then I understand you were a chemical engineer; how did you get---how did you decide on doing that?

**Kobata:**

Well, I started out as being a chemist and then I didn't like that; so at junior college, I switched to chemical engineering. Then I went to USC because UCLA didn't provide the chemical engineering training at that time.

**Interviewer:**

So when did you graduate from college?

**Kobata:**

1950---the winter of 1950.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; so what was it like at USC back then?

**Kobata:**

Well, I understand the tuition was much lower. I think when I first got there I paid \$11 a unit.

**Interviewer:**

[Laughs] Wow; but it was still a private school.

**Kobata:**

It was a private school, but there was a lot of competition because you know I never was in the Army, so I had to compete with a lot of the veterans that came back and were on the GI Bill.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh.

**Kobata:**

And they were much older, and of course they were more wiser than I was. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

Oh; you mean in your same classes you mean?

**Kobata:**

Yeah, yeah; uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Oh I see. And then after you graduated in the early '50s, then what did you do?

**Kobata:**

I worked for a company named Great Lakes Carbon Corporation and they had a minerals division in Waltheria. Do you know where Waltheria is? And, I worked there at the lab for about 10 years. And then I---three of us quit our job and we tried to start a pearlite business. We were in the business for about three years and then that didn't work out. So I started to work for L.A. Department of Water and Power---and this time s as a mechanical engineer, not as a chemical.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm; so did you retrain yourself, or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No. [Laughs] It was---chemical engineering and mechanical are fairly similar, but they actually needed a chemical engineer, but they don't have a title such as chemical engineer. So they you know accepted me as a mechanical.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm; I understand you got---you have your Master's Degree.

0:39:40.6

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

When did you get that?

**Kobata:**

1986; it's called an Executive Master's Degree.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; is that with your MBA?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; EB---yeah; EMBA now. That's what they call it nowadays.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; so I'm . . . a lot of people weren't able to find you know jobs early in the---early '50s, especially when a lot of them . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; it was true for me, too.

**Interviewer:**

Did you have a hard time finding a job after graduation?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; I think there was a little bit of discrimination among the oil companies especially. So what I did was I stayed another year to get my Master's Degree.

**Interviewer:**

At USC?

**Kobata:**

USC; uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-hm.

**Kobata:**

And then finally a friend of mine at school told me about a job over here in WALTERIA. So that's where he was working; so I applied and I got the job.

**Interviewer:**

And was your friend a Japanese American?

**Kobata:**

No, no.

**Interviewer:**

But he was working there so he knew . . . you kind of had somebody to vouch for you?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay.

**Kobata:**

He was actually working for his PhD at the time. **[Laughs]**

**Interviewer:**

Oh; and so did you have friends who graduated and had a hard time getting jobs, too, though?

**Kobata:**

You know I really don't know whether they had a hard time getting jobs or not.

**Interviewer:**

Were there very many Japanese Americans at USC at that time?

**Kobata:**

Yeah quite a few; yeah I mean we had a Nisei Trojan Club.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; I was a member.

**Kobata:**

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

Yeah oh; and then how active were you at USC then?

**Kobata:**

At USC?

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh.

0:41:26.5

**Kobata:**

Not too active because with the studies I had, you couldn't be very active because chemical engineering is a very difficult course, and I was taking 19 units per semester.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

Yeah; those were pretty hard courses.

**Interviewer:**

So who financed your education at USC?

**Kobata:**

Well, I earned a part of it during the summer and after school and weekends. And the family did, I guess; Uncle Jimmy was the primary one.

**Interviewer:**

Were they supportive of you in your education?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah; very much so.

**Interviewer:**

And how about your brothers?

**Kobata:**

Yeah they were; yeah, because I was the first one to ever finish college in my family.

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; that's great. And then, so now---so you worked for the Water and Power?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And how was your job over there? And did you like your job over there?

**Kobata:**

Oh, very much; yeah. The fact is I worked till I was 69---until they had a layoff.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, oh; that's . . . .

**Kobata:**

But it was a real great job. It was a great place to work.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; and did you find any discrimination at all while in your job there?

**Kobata:**

No, no; none at all.

**Interviewer:**

So now---okay; let's go back now. When did you get married?

**Kobata:**

1954---October 1st.

**Interviewer:**

Very good; you know . . . . [Laughs]

**Kobata:**

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

And how did you meet your wife?

**Kobata:**

Well, I first met her in Salt Lake City once, you know. And then later on, she moved over here and, of course, then she came over quite frequently because Rose was married to my brother---her older sister.

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Kobata:**

You know Rose Kobata?

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh.

**Kobata:**

That---her older sister was married to my brother, so you know we frequently met.

**Interviewer:**

And which brother is she married to?

**Kobata:**

?Yoshio?. Rose is married to Yoshio.

**Interviewer:**

Oh I see, oh; and do you have any children?

**Kobata:**

Yes, I have two---daughter that's about 45 years old and a son that's about 42 years old. The daughter is married and has three grand---I mean three kids. The son is still single. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; well we'll keep him mind for . . . .[Laughs] Okay; and do you---did they grow up here in the South Bay?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-huh.

0:44:07.8

**Interviewer:**

I guess so because---and they went to Gardena High School?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And did you---did they have---they probably by the time they went to school, life was pretty, pretty easy for them to assimilate?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah. They you know they graduated from Gardena High School and they went directly to Long Beach State. They didn't want to go to any other school except Long Beach State.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; okay well let's see now. I think maybe it . . . is there anything else that you want to talk about that you know maybe we didn't cover or . . . ? Let's see . . . .

**Kobata:**

We didn't discuss---we didn't sort of mention the airport that was at the end of 139th and Western.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; why don't you describe some of the . . . oh okay; before we do that, maybe we'll take a little break and then . . . okay; we'll stop right now.

[Break]

0:45:19.8

**Interviewer:**

Okay, continuing on with the interview . . . .

**Kobata:**

Okay.

**Interviewer:**

Let's see; can you describe as much as you can about what you remember of the Gardena area before you left for, you know Utah, and then what it was like after you came back? So, let's start with before.

**Kobata:**

Well, before you know Gardena at that time was, you know comparatively so-called civilized because there weren't huge acreage that was, you know vacant or anything like that, except maybe for the airport area. There were---we had homes along Normandie and Budlong and along Marine. It used to be---it was Compton Boulevard \_\_\_\_\_. And, there were houses all along Normandie, even up to Gardena High School.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm.

**Kobata:**

That's at one---what's that, 162nd and Normandie?

**Interviewer:**

Uh-hm.

**Kobata:**

But, there were a lot of vacant, you know pieces of property, but they weren't huge tracts of property and empty.

**Interviewer:**

What were the major streets back then that were already in place?

**Kobata:**

Naturally Vermont and Normandie, Western . . . the cross streets---I don't recall the cross streets---Compton Boulevard and you know the streets in Gardena, they're not exactly main streets, you know like 162nd and 164th Street---things of that sort.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh; so they were already in place. Were they paved or were they dirt?



**Kobata:**

Some---no; I think they were all paved.

0:47:05.1

**Interviewer:**

What about---what was Western like? Was Western Avenue in place already?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah; it was one of the major thoroughfares. In fact, it was around Redondo Beach and Western, there was a small Japanese community built there. There was a lot of stores and then a Chinese restaurant. And then we . . . I think I mentioned in the pre-interview that there used to be a movie theatre there for Japanese movies. And it was called, I think, Yamata Hall. They showed black and white and I think some of it was---I think the first ones were without sound.

**Interviewer:**

This is Redondo Beach Boulevard and . . . ?

**Kobata:**

It's on Western.

**Interviewer:**

. . . Western?

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Kobata:**

Let's see; it's just about where the Honda---it's south---north of the Honda dealer, yeah; uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay.

**Kobata:**

And that was kind of the center of the Japanese community as far as you know . . . when I say Japanese community, that's all the farm areas around Hawthorne and Lawndale and Torrance.

**Interviewer:**

So what did your family do on the weekends? Did you ever do anything?

**Kobata:**

You know we never did much as a family to tell you the truth, [Laughs] because with the nursery business, you had to work almost seven days a week. And I know that my mother took us to a couple of Wakayama Kenjinkai picnics a long time ago. And after the war, I think we mentioned, we had a club called the Dinks. And, that was just a lot of Japanese friends that we had--- Nisei---and we used to go to the beach almost every weekend on summer---during the summer. We used to go to Alamitos Bay, which . . . in Long Beach.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-hm; gee what was it like, like Manhattan Beach and Redondo; was it . . . ?

**Kobata:**

A lot of . . . .

**Interviewer:**

Open?

**Kobata:**

Well, I don't remember Redondo . . . I mean, I remember Redondo Beach. Yeah; Redondo Beach was fairly open and there was a lot of farming there---strawberry and flower growing. And, that's where all of the prime soil came from was the Redondo Beach area, that sandy soil. It's the topsoil that everybody used for all of these---for all of these new homes that were being built. But, you know---no longer available.

**Interviewer:**

You mean they would get the soil?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; there used to be, you know hilly areas, and they'd just dig the sand from the hilly areas.

0:49:57.8

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Kobata:**

Sandy soil is very good soil for nursery and for garden, lawns, and things.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, huh; was there a pier at that point? Do you remember a pier?

**Kobata:**

No, I don't remember---I can't say. I imagine there was, but I don't remember too much about it.

**Interviewer:**

Did you ever go to like White Point or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah, yeah; I've been to White Point. I think . . . was that where the Japanese school was? I forgot. I know that---I remember White Point for sure.

**Interviewer:**

Where else did people go back then?

**Kobata:**

In the old days?

**Interviewer:**

Recreation . . . just White Point?

**Kobata:**

Oh, I do remember that we did go as a family to a beach called Brighton Beach. I think that's near Cabrillo Beach somewhere.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, okay.

**Kobata:**

Or, was it---was it Terminal Island? I forgot which, but my uncle had a---it was really not strange, but it was different because he was one of the few that had a 16-foot Mahogany outboard boat with [Laughs] an Evinrude motor on it, and he would take it out to the beach.

**Interviewer:**

He had a boat?

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

0:51:23.8

**Interviewer:**

Where did he store his boat?

**Kobata:**

At the nursery. We had a lot of space at the nursery.

**Interviewer:**

And how did you get the boat to the water?

**Kobata:**

Trailer, I guess; I don't remember. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

But, remember my uncle had a lot of money, relatively speaking, because of the land that he owns. All the people were very grateful for him; you know having bought the land for them. So they gave him a lot of gifts. So he, you know he had a lot of the modern devices like---he had a 16-millimeter camera, and you know the motor boat, and so-called stereo of that day.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, no kidding. And so let's see; how about the Gardena area around here; was there an airport---I understand there was an airport off of Western?

**Kobata:**

Yes; there was an airport there. Let's see; between Western and Crenshaw and between Rosecrans north to about 120th---not 120th---El Segundo---not quite El Segundo---135th I guess. And, north of the airport was a farm, and in fact, my cousin, Tuck, and his family did some flower growing on the---from El Segundo south along Western Avenue, and then there were farms all over along El Segundo because that's where they had a well. And then there was a family called, Johnson, that owned it, I guess. And it was called Johnson Ranch. So a lot of the farmers had leased their land along El Segundo between Western and Crenshaw.

**Interviewer:**

Now the airport closed down?

**Kobata:**

It did; yeah. But, we had a lot of fun looking at airplanes because they'd let us, you know on the field and you know we could crawl around and see what's going on.

0:53:39.1

**Interviewer:**

What kind of---what kind of planes landed there?

**Kobata:**

Well, they were all these single engine aircraft; you know personal aircraft---nothing commercial.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; so who owned these airplanes that were being used back then?

**Kobata:**

I really don't know.

**Interviewer:**

Oh; did they have hangars over there, too?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; they had hangars, yeah. And I---you know I was just so young, I really don't know the details of that.

**Interviewer:**

And, then I remember long ago off of Western, it was pretty swampy though.

**Kobata:**

Yeah; it was until they built the storm drain system. It used to flood up to my cousin's place, Tuck's place. You know 139th Street would be completely covered.

**Interviewer:**

Did you ever have any problems on the . . . ?

**Kobata:**

No, we didn't have any problems.

**Interviewer:**

With water?

**Kobata:**

No.

**Interviewer:**

Oh.

**Kobata:**

It was Tuck that was submerged a lot of the time.

**Interviewer:**

His nursery?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

He was further west, closer to Western. And the strange thing is that once in a while the . . . you know they have big ditches on each side of 139th Street for the rainwater---storm water, and every---we'd like to go down there because there'd be frogs and tadpoles and even goldfish. Do you know where the goldfish came from? **[Laughs]** It came from a goldfish farm on El Segundo and Western. There used to be a goldfish farm there before the war.

**Interviewer:**

And they just released them into the water?

**Kobata:**

No, no; I guess it just flooded them out. It was flooded out.  
**[Laughs]**

**Interviewer:**

Oh, my gosh; wow.

**Kobata:**

And then you know in that same area on 139th, well maybe two or three blocks east of Western on the north side, there was a tennis court, and it was built in the middle of nowhere. And, it must have been built in the 1920s. And, I think it was built by Jeannie's uncle, Joe Kobata. I know he played a lot of tennis

there. It was I think maybe because there was some discrimination that the Japanese built their own tennis court you know out of concrete and there was a high wired fence all around---two courts.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; so who got to use the tennis courts?

**Kobata:**

I think whoever built it. I think it was a group of Japanese that got together and built it.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

But all, you know all around there was just nothing but tall grass. [Laughs] And the tennis court was just sitting out in the middle there.

**Interviewer:**

So what did you and your friends to for fun in high school?

**Kobata:**

High school, like I said, I didn't have much fun. [Laughs] Well, we did go to movies; that was the primary thing---was movies. And, most of us were working or something like that.

**Interviewer:**

Oh that's right, because you were in---you were in Utah.

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

0:57:01.0

**Interviewer:**

That's right.

**Kobata:**

Yeah; and then before the war, I told you that we were belonged to the YMCA Club. It was formed at our church and we had about 12 to 15 people, Japanese and some Hakuujins, and we played league ball on Saturdays.

**Interviewer:**

And this is before the war?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; then we had meeting every so often.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so you've been---have you---so, do you still maintain your membership with the YMCA, and are you . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Well yeah; I still work---help the YMCA because what happened was that my brother was one of the co-founders of the Gardena Carson YMCA.

**Interviewer:**

Is that right?

**Kobata:**

Yeah.

**Interviewer:**

This is your brother, Ed?

**Kobata:**

Yo.

**Interviewer:**

Yo?

**Kobata:**

Yo was the one that was community active---active in the community. He founded the---co-founded the JCI also.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, yeah I know; okay now it's---everything is come back. Yeah; oh it's your brother?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; tell me something about the Dinks.

**Kobata:**



Well, the Dinks were formed after the war, and just a group of us mainly that were going to junior college---Compton Junior College, and we're all Niseis. And there was about 15---maybe up to 25, depending on whether we invited them to certain activities or not. So, it was active for about, I guess 15 years or so, and then everybody started having kids and then they started to diverge. And, a lot of people moved away, too, because they---a lot of them are in Orange County. But, we still have a reunion once in a while.

**Interviewer:**

So these, the people who are members of the Dinks did they all, you know did they all go to junior college?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; we had---we were at the junior college together, I guess.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, and then . . . so then now did they all get jobs after college? Were they pretty much---relatively successful?

**Kobata:**

Yeah; I would say so, yeah. In fact, one fellow was---he just---he went to college only a year and he took over his farm---family or his father's nursery, and he built that up until, you know he owns two places---one in Gardena and one in Somas. His name is Sam Fujimoto.

**[Phone rings]**

**Kobata:**

Coast Nurseries; so he's a really big . . . .

**Interviewer:**

Oh yeah; he was a member of the Dinks.

**Kobata:**

Yeah, uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Oh that's neat.

**Kobata:**

But, most of the others were sort of professional type. You know one was a psychologist and then others were construction and

stuff like that. Oh, I've got to answer this phone because . . .  
can you stop?

**Interviewer:**

All right; we'll stop.

**[Interruption]**

**Kobata:**

Okay.

**Interviewer:** Okay; continuing with the people that you  
associated with in the Dinks, they're around your age?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

And then they're, you know---they've done pretty well. Are they  
all Nisei?

**Kobata:**

Yes, they are.

**Interviewer:**

All Nisei?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

1:00:33.5

**Interviewer:**

So they've---I wonder, as a group, do you feel that you kind of  
like helped each other along, or do you think that was . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Well, you know I'm not too sure about that. But, you know we're  
just close, you know good friends, and it's nice to meet old  
friends again. And so, we like to get together once in a while.  
And yeah; I guess you could say we could support each other  
because you don't criticize each other for sure.

**Interviewer:**

Now, we can talk a little bit about what you're doing now after  
your retirement. Are you enjoying your retirement?

**Kobata:**

Oh yeah; very, very much so. I like the fact that I can sleep in, in the mornings. I mean, I've spent most of my time lately in the last three, four years on the church projects. I am active with the church.

**Interviewer:**

Now, was the Baptist . . . ? I understand you're active at the Baptist---Gardena Valley Baptist.

**Kobata:**

Gardena Valley Baptist; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Was that there? Maybe you might tell them a little history about the church. Do you know when it started, or . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Yes; this September 19th we're having our 90th anniversary. So, it was started in 1914, I think, in Gardena. But, not at the same location. It was on Dalton and 164th Street, I believe. Now, we're on 158th and Denker and LaSalle.

**Interviewer:**

Were you active in the church back then as a kid?

**Kobata:**

Yes, because we had a YMCA Club and went to Sunday school.

**Interviewer:**

And it was an all Japanese church?

**Kobata:**

It was all Japanese; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

So have you seen a lot of change in the church over the years?

**Kobata:**

Oh, quite a bit, because you have to change with time, and we've grown much bigger for sure. [Laughs]

1:02:33.6

**Interviewer:**

Yeah; so you were . . . like what happened to the church at the brink of the war?

**Kobata:**

Oh, the original church that we had, the Mission Society owned--L.A. City Mission Society, and what they did was they moved that away for another church. And so, when we came back, they gave us another---they bought us another piece of property and built a church for us.

**Interviewer:**

Oh wow; so that existing---where the church is right now?

**Kobata:**

Yes, uh-huh; the fact is, we're going to demolish that church that they built [Laughs] in the next month.

**Interviewer:**

Really?

**Kobata:**

Yeah, uh-hm.

**Interviewer:**

Oh, so what are the plans for the church then?

**Kobata:**

We're going to demolish most of the church and then rebuild. That's why I have the plans.

**Interviewer:**

On the site---on the existing site where it is from the Pacific Supermarket?

**Kobata:**

Yes; one of the problems we have is that in North Torrance or any part of Torrance, there is no large place---you know acreage that you could buy, and we need at least five acres. And they, you know something that had to be convenient and not close to the refinery or anything like that. So, we finally decided that we better stay in Gardena, although most of the people are from North Torrance because of the school system. And most of older Niseis are in Gardena, but the newer younger folks are in Torrance. So, we are trying to build as much as we can on that you know property we have. In fact, we will cut our parking in half that's adjacent to the church right now.

**Interviewer:**

So, are you going to have a parking structure?

**Kobata:**

No, we're parking at Union Bank; we have a lease with Union Bank. They'll give us 68 parking spaces during the weekday and something like 160 on Sunday mornings.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

So, we're only about a block and a half away from the Union Bank.

1:04:54.1

**Interviewer:**

Oh, because I know Union Bank has a parking lot across the street.

**Kobata:**

No, they don't have that anymore.

**Interviewer:**

They don't?

**Kobata:**

No, they have . . . .

**Interviewer:**

Where's 168 spots?

**Kobata:**

Hmm? Well, you know that parking lot---it goes quite deep, you know. It's not just the front part; it goes way in the back.

**Interviewer:**

I'm talking---you're talking west of Western?

**Kobata:**

No, on the same property as the bank itself.

**Interviewer:**

I didn't know that.

**Kobata:**

It goes way back.

1:05:25.0

**Interviewer:**

Oh; that's pretty good. So you've been involved in the church activities. Were you involved in church after you came back from Utah?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm; since---probably since 1945 or '46.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm; and then like, you know what was it when you came back after the war? Was it like the social center for . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Yes, it was---it was a social center and then since we didn't have a church we met at Torrance Baptist Church for quite a while, and then we finally, I think rented a space from the Seventh Day Adventist on Denker. And then, they built us a new building in 1950 or '51, and we moved in there. That's the building we're going to demolish.

**Interviewer:**

So I know there's a main chapel, and then there's that auxiliary building on the right, facing the church, and then there's a parking lot. So that whole thing is going to be changed over?

**Kobata:**

Uh-hm; yeah.

**Interviewer:**

Oh okay; that's real interesting. So do you . . . the people who are involved in this are---are they long-time Gardena residents as well?

**Kobata:**

Let's see; yeah I think most of the people that are involved are not Gardena people, mostly from Torrance or PV or somewhere else.

**Interviewer:**

And you have remained here in Gardena all your life?

**Kobata:**

Yes.

**Interviewer:**

So have you . . . what's the neighborhood and you know are your neighbors still just about the same?

**Kobata:**

Yes, we have two Hakujuin neighbors right over here. They've been there since the start. And then there's, I think, there's three Japanese people here and I would say about half the people are still here.

**Interviewer:**

Hmm; and then the other half?

**Kobata:**

They've moved on and then new people have come in.

**Interviewer:**

So do you---do you still, I mean . . . and then do most of the people go into Gardena to do all their social, or no---actually Torrance area to do all their . . . ?

**Kobata:**

Yes; uh-huh.

**Interviewer:**

Okay; is there anything else that you want to tell us about, you know that we might have missed? Let's see . . . .

**Kobata:**

There probably is, but I can't think of anything right now.

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

[Laughs] I know; so when your family . . . when you . . . how old are your grandchildren?

1:08:41.3

**Kobata:**

My oldest one is twelve and a half; the next one---grandson is nine---exactly not nine until . . . wait a minute; is he . . .

yeah he'll be nine; he's nine. He'll be ten in July, and the youngest one is four.

**Interviewer:**

And have you ever talked about any of your experiences with your children, pre-war and after war?

**Kobata:**

A little bit, but not too much. I don't know why, but we just never talked about it.

**Interviewer:**

A lot of families don't talk about---didn't talk about the war after they came back.

**Kobata:**

Yeah; well one of the things is that younger people are not that interested. Like, I wasn't that interested in you know historical things, and that's why I said I regretted not listening to my mother a little bit more and inquire more about the background.

**Interviewer:**

Uh-huh, yeah; and so you're---do you---you think you feel you'll talk a little bit more to your grandchildren about you know things that have happened in the past?

**Kobata:**

Yes; and then this is one of the reasons why we got these books together is to have a written family history so that our grandkids or their children have something to fall back on.

**Interviewer:**

Well, tell me something about these reunions that you've had. You've had two major reunions in the past?

**Kobata:**

Yes, yes; and another one before that.

**Interviewer:**

When was the first major reunion you've had?

**Kobata:**

It was---what was it . . . 1997, and the last one was in 2000.

**Interviewer:**



And how many people attend the reunion?

**Kobata:**

About 110 to 120.

**Interviewer:**

And these are all your relatives?

**Kobata:**

Relatives and some close friends.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; that's a lot. And where do you get together on this?

1:10:46.7

**Kobata:**

Well, the last time we got together at our church and then the time before was at the Marriott Hotel.

**Interviewer:**

Wow.

**Kobata:**

And there's supposed to be another one scheduled at 2005, but I don't know who's going to head it up. I'm trying to talk some people into it. [Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

[Laughs] And then how far---what's the farthest somebody has come, you know what distance to come to these reunions?

**Kobata:**

I think Connecticut is the farthest; yeah. It might be Ireland next time, who knows.

**Interviewer:**

Wow; that's great.

**Kobata:**

[Laughs]

**Interviewer:**

Okay; well there's a question here maybe I'll ask you. Can you tell me why you believe it's important to preserve these stories for the future generations?

**Kobata:**

Well mainly because of the fact that, you know---life was a lot different say for my grandfather and father and mother and even for myself compared to my kids. And, I think they ought to know a little bit about how much they had to work hard to make success of themselves. And, you know I think you give them a little sense of family unity, you know they're all part of a big family.

**Interviewer:**

Well, thank you very much. It's been a great experience talking to you. And, I've learned alot about the Gardena area, as well.  
[Laughs]

**Kobata:**

Well, thank you very much, Lily. It was a very interesting talk.

**Interviewer:**

I guess we'll end the interview now.

1:12:28.2

[End Harold Kobata - CD 1]